

AGENCY DESCRIPTION

ASPIRA, INC. OF NEW JERSEY

Established in 1968, ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey is the oldest and most recognized Hispanic organization in New Jersey. ASPIRA has identified the development of a better educated and more community conscious youth as its primary mission. Since its founding, ASPIRA has helped nearly 30,000 New Jersey minority students finish high school and go to post-secondary education. Programs include personal, educational, and career counseling, dropout prevention and leadership development, post-secondary placement and assistance in obtaining financial aid.

There are five ASPIRA centers state-wide located in the counties of Camden, Mercer, Hudson, Essex and Passaic providing services to students in fifteen public schools in urban cities. Of the fifteen schools providing services, five are middle schools and ten are high schools. ASPIRA also provides services to students who have dropped out of high school, are at the college level, or simply want to continue their education. Students not in our caseload seek our services because they are referred, or have heard of the agency through the radio, newspapers, friends or family members.

Support for ASPIRA comes from a wide range of sources including federal and state government, private foundations, corporations and individual donors.

Although our mandate is to serve all of New Jersey's youth, the focus of the agency's work has always been in Newark. Currently, the Essex County Center is serving high school students from Barringer, Science, Central and Eastside High Schools, in addition to younger students from Barringer Prep and Luis Munoz Marin Middle School.

ASPIRA's programs are designed to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged and culturally different youngsters. The "ASPIRA Process" involves democratically organized and operated student clubs through which ASPIRA recruits students at the schools.

ASPIRA's mission of "Leadership through Education" promotes:

- a value for education;
- community awareness and participation;
- a positive self-identity;
- the development of leadership skills; and
- parent awareness of educational programs and policies that affect their children.

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey is the only community-based,

private, non-profit agency that provides its services within the public schools, during regular school hours. Each year the scope and quality of its services increases, as does the good reputation it enjoys from the community.

Supporting ASPIRA is an act that helps "at-risk" students to remain in school and to attain high levels of formal education. The economic restructuring taking place in the state, and the projections of national demographics, make it evident that a grant to ASPIRA is an investment in the economic strength of Essex County.

OVERVIEW OF ASPIRA'S CORE PROGRAMS AND HOW THEY WORK

"Aspira" is a Spanish word. In our organization it is directed at Latino and other minority youth and tells them: "You must aspire". Specifically, ASPIRA's purpose is to encourage and assist them to strive towards the highest possible levels of:

1. formal education
2. effective leadership
3. commitment to their community

Since 1968 ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey has been engaged in discovering alternatives that will increase the school retention of Puerto Rican/Latino and other minority students. After more than two decades of effort, ASPIRA is proud of what it calls the Aspira Core Programs, a tried and tested approach that, as of today, has helped thousands of students stay in school, graduate from high school and initiate post-secondary and college studies.

ASPIRA hires counselors, trains them, and places them in schools that have high concentrations of Latino students as part of the Dropout Prevention and Leadership Development Program. These counselors are assigned to schools and work out of the guidance office at least three days per week. Students are recruited through: classroom/homeroom presentations; flyers and posters; presentations to faculty and guidance counselors; referrals; direct contact through students at school; identification of interested students through workshops, field trips, conferences and other activities.

Most of this work is accomplished through the formation and development of ASPIRA Clubs, which are democratically organized and operated by students with the assistance of our counselors. Early in the school year a Leadership Retreat is provided for the clubs elected officers. The clubs meet regularly (the average is twice per month) during the school year, utilizing parliamentary procedures, and preparing their own agendas, supervised by the counselors. Club members are called "Aspirantes" (those who aspire).

Aspirantes participate in a variety of career and post-secondary education orientation activities. Cultural/ethnic awareness and identity events are an important component in the annual program of activities sponsored by ASPIRA. Moreover, students organize dances and other "for fun" activities, conducting their own fundraising to finance them. In May, a Statewide Youth Conference is convened for club delegates to discuss topics they deem relevant. At the end of the school year, an Awards Night Ceremony is held to recognize special merit.

During the summer, some students become Interns in diverse career-oriented programs and counselors become engaged in staff

development and program documentation activities. In the late summer, ASPIRA and its students proudly participate in a major public cultural awareness event, the Puerto Rican Day Parade. When the school year starts in September, the staff is ready to continue its work with the carry-over student caseload, and to recruit new participants into the active caseload.

ASPIRA counselors not only facilitate club activities, but also provide a variety of bilingual services, including personal, career and academic orientation and counseling, as needed. In the process, counselors become natural role models for students. Most counselors are young Latino college graduates (a Bachelor's degree is the minimum acceptable credential).

Staff empathy, familiarity with the students culture and language, and a commitment to students success are among the qualitative aspects of the ASPIRA Process which make a difference. This was confirmed in 1981 when, with the assistance of the William T. Grant Foundation, ASPIRA undertook an effort to have SOMOS, Inc., an external evaluation firm, conduct an assessment of ASPIRA operations since its inception. Thousands of alumni records were analyzed, and these data were complemented by a mail survey and home visits to former Aspirantes for personal interviews. The Evaluation Report (ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey. A Decade's Retrospective Evaluation Study, Newark, New Jersey, August, 1982) provides evidence that ASPIRA has always been ahead of its time in meeting the unmet needs of Latino and minority students in the public schools of New Jersey.

Findings indicated that 80% of Aspirantes felt ASPIRA had made a significant difference in forming their career goals, strengthening their ethnic and cultural identity, and improving their self-image; two-thirds stated that their classroom experience improved after joining ASPIRA; more than half of the college-bound students cited ASPIRA as a major factor in their decision to go to college and, of these, 25% said that ASPIRA was the most important factor. Even Club members who never met with an ASPIRA counselor "still reported ASPIRA as a positive influence on career goals, ethnicity and personal identity". The total setting which ASPIRA provides, not just counseling, appears to be important.

What the 1982 evaluation study called "the total setting which ASPIRA provides" refers to more than physical facilities. In many cases, our counselors share office space with regular school (office space is often an in-kind contribution provided by schools). Most club meetings are held in regular classrooms. Counselors approach students in the school hallways, or cafeterias for important reminders.

What the ASPIRA staff does provide, irrespective of location, is a sense of belonging which helps the students feel more comfortable and purposeful in school. Accurate, updated guidance on a variety of subjects of interest to students (ranging from AIDS to teenage pregnancy) is also available from the ASPIRA staff.

Moreover, the staff's high expectations constitute a challenge. In the words of a former Aspirante:

ASPIRA... was the first Newark organization that recognized the role of Puerto Rican youth in the community, encouraging us to aim for the highest college placement, to do the very best. It truly became the backbone of support of our high school life. ASPIRA really pushed. Even when we were not ready, it pushed...It was a challenge that could not be refused.

The quote is a reflection upon the ASPIRA experience, provided in writing to ASPIRA in December, 1980 by Carmelo Colon, an alumnus. Mr. Colon grew up in Newark's Columbus Home Projects, graduated from high school in 1971 and is now a Mental Health Clinician at the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey. His story, and his views about ASPIRA, are representative of those of the majority of the students that ASPIRA serves.

ASPIRA is currently conducting a new, 10-year evaluation of its effectiveness, with the assistance of Educational Testing Service. Findings will not only be internally discussed, but also provided to the agency's friends, funders and donors.

ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

The following staff will be involved in the Dropout Prevention and Leadership Development Program:

Executive Director:

Minimum Qualifications: Masters Degree in the social sciences or related field with a focus on administration. A minimum of five years experience in administration with an emphasis on planning, directing, controlling, negotiating, staffing, and budgeting. Must be bilingual in Spanish and English and have knowledge of the educational problems encountered by urban city youth.

Responsibilities: Responsible for the overall administration of the program. Meets with staff to monitor compliance of program objectives. Designs the program with the assistance of the Program Director. Develops and monitors the budget of the program.

Program Director:

Minimum Qualifications: Masters Degree in the social sciences or related field and some experience working with youth. A Bachelor of Arts with two years experience working with youth, of which one year will have been in a supervisory role, may be substituted for a Masters Degree. Must be bilingual in English and Spanish and have working knowledge of the educational problems encountered by Latino and other minority youth.

Dropout Prevention Counselor:

Minimum Qualifications: Bachelor of Arts in the social sciences or related field with working knowledge of the educational problems of Latino and other minority youth. Must be bilingual in Spanish and English.

Responsibilities: Recruits at-risk middle school and high school students and provides them with individual and family counseling. Meets with school personnel such as teachers and guidance counselors for referrals into the program. Documents all counseling sessions with program participants in their personal casefile. Implements "survival skills" workshops for participants. Facilitates a student run club. Acts as an advocate for students with school personnel. Expected to re-enroll 95% of the program participants into school for the following academic year. Submits a monthly report on the first day of each month reflecting counseling activities and any pertinent statistical data. Other duties may be assigned as deemed necessary.

Computer Consultant:

Minimum Qualifications: Bachelor of Science in computer science or related field. A minimum of five years experience in the field, three of which should be working with non-profit agencies.

Responsibilities: Familiarize students with computer functions and capabilities. Train students on data base management. Access computer hardware and software needs of the agency.

Tutor:

Minimum Qualifications: College or graduate student with above average grades in English and mathematics. A minimum of one year tutoring experience. Must be bilingual in Spanish and English.

Responsibilities: Provides individual/group tutoring to participating students in a designated academic subject. Monitors students progress and records all tutoring sessions in the students personal file. Oversees peer-to-peer tutoring component of the afterschool program at the school.

PROGRAM METHOD

After the initial training and orientation sessions are completed, staff will meet with school officials from Barringer Prep, Luis Munoz Marin Middle School, Barringer, Central, Science and Eastside High Schools. Once the Dropout Prevention Counselor has been stationed at the school the recruitment of participants will begin.

Recruitment efforts will include students referred by school personnel, such as teachers, counselors and the principal, and who meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. Increased absenteeism
 - a. Students who are truant from school 1 - 3 days consecutively more than twice.
 - b. Students that are truant more than five days.
 - c. Students with a pattern of absenteeism on Mondays and Fridays.
 - d. Students who cut classes 1 - 3 days per week.
2. Students who exhibit disruptive behavior in the classrooms.
3. Students who have been suspended.
4. Students identified with extraordinary personal or family problems.
5. Students who have a poor academic record.
6. Students identified with potential but who have exhibited problems of adjustment or unsatisfactory academic proficiency.

The Dropout Prevention Counselor will initiate an intensive recruitment drive. During the first half of the program year, the Dropout Prevention Counselor will meet with potential participants to determine eligibility, after which an intake form will be completed. The Dropout Prevention Counselor will arrange for weekly counseling sessions. After the second counseling session an intake will be completed and an assessment made as to the specific problems being encountered by the participant. If during the program a reassessment is necessary it will be completed accordingly. Once the initial assessment has been completed a counseling plan and contract will be developed and agreed upon by both counselor and participant. The contract will stipulate participation in tutoring and the "survival skills" training sessions.

Counseling services will take place in the school either during non-classroom time or through appointments during class time, with the teacher's approval. Counseling sessions that require intensive attention will be held at the counselor's office at ASPIRA. Counseling sessions will focus on educational and personal matters.

Program participants will also be exposed to a "survival

skills" curriculum. It will focus on topics that will enable participants to make informed and healthy decisions. Topics will include substance abuse, educational choices, promoting healthy lifestyles, decision making skills, critical thinking, puberty and sexuality, talking to parents, goal setting, peer pressure as well as role playing exercises. Field trips to colleges, business settings, and museums will allow students to broaden their perspective on career choices. Cultural identity will be reinforced through participation in Three Kings Day, The Areyto Ceremony, the Puerto Rican Day Parade, and relevant workshops.

Program participants will also be encouraged to become involved with the ASPIRA Club at their school. ASPIRA Club meetings will be held a minimum of twice a month.

In the final months of the academic year, the Dropout Prevention Counselor will insure that program participants are re-enrolled into school for the following academic year. During the summer months continuous follow-up will be conducted to reaffirm and reinforce participants' desire to finish school. Students who have been successfully enrolled into another school for the following academic year will be terminated from the program. Students receive a comprehensive program of services which include educational, leadership and cultural awareness activities.

It is expected that once participants are exposed to a supportive counselor, many positive changes will occur. Critical to the success of the program will be the follow-up that will be conducted during the summer months.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The main tool in the evaluation plan will be the Employee Performance Appraisal (EPA), an evaluation instrument which is utilized by ASPIRA. The EPA measures program activities against the program objectives on a monthly basis. Data from the EPA is summarized and aggregated. Percentages of success at the end of the year can be easily determined and progress toward our program objectives traced by the Program Director. Monthly narratives and statistical reports and placement and/or re-enrollment reports will also be used to evaluate our program.

The evaluation of this program will be qualitative as well as quantitative. We will measure our internal management and performance through student and school personnel reactions. The Program Director will maintain close contact with school personnel in order to obtain independent subjective evaluations of the program and its staff. This will be accomplished through the use of student evaluations of program activities and counselor effectiveness and feedback from school personnel and other agencies the counselor may have worked with.

Also, a Daily Information Sheet (DIS) will be submitted by the counselor to the Program Director. The DIS includes the participant's name, nature of the session, date, who initiated the contact, and the length of the counseling session. The information from the DIS will later be expanded and transferred into the participant's personal file. The DIS are vital in determining whether the program's goal or objectives are in jeopardy. Participants' attendance will be monitored daily by the counselor. At the end of each week teachers will notify if any participant failed to attend class at any time during the week. This information will be recorded and placed into the student's personal file.

File audits will be conducted monthly to insure that the Dropout Prevention Counselor's files are up to date. The counselor must submit monthly reports which include: grade level, sex, ethnicity, income breakdown, program activities, number/length of counseling sessions, and activities held. The monthly reports will also comment upon any success and/or shortcomings experienced by the counselor.

ASPIRA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CITIZEN SERVICES

ASPIRA is eager to work in conjunction with the Department of Citizen Services, Division of Youth Services, in identifying those students who are at-risk and in need of our services. Further, we will furnish any reports, with appropriate data, that DCA requires and explore ways to modify, expand and improve on the Dropout Prevention and Leadership Development Program.

TWELVE (12) MONTH BUDGET ESTIMATION

A. PERSONNEL

<u>Title</u>	<u>% Of Time</u>	<u># Of Months</u>	<u>Salary</u>
Executive Director	5%	12	\$1900
Program Director	10%	12	1995
Dropout Prevention Coun.	50%	12	7900
Office Clerk			
(@ \$5/hr./15/wk.)	-	12	1900
			\$15,695

B. FRINGE BENEFITS

<u>Item</u>	<u>Rate %</u>	
FICA	7.65%	
SUI	1.45%	
Workmen's Compensation	3.40%	
Group Insurance	10.00%	
	Total Fringe	3,533

C. OTHER COSTS

Telephone	\$1200	
Postage	350	
*Travel (local)	1200	
**Training	3030	
	Total Other Costs	5,780
	TOTAL ESTIMATED BUDGET	\$25,008
	ESTIMATED CASELOAD	750
	UNIT COST	\$33.34

*Includes \$1,140 for bus rental
 ** Includes computer consultant @ \$45/hr/34 hrs. and tutor @ \$10/hr./150 hrs.

(PLEASE NOTE: These employees are not paid fringe benefits)

PROPOSAL ATTACHMENTS

1. Daily Information Sheet
2. Intake Form
3. Standardized Examination Record
4. Student Activity Attendance Record
5. Counseling Entry Form
6. ASPIRA Student Profile
7. Appointment Verification Form
8. ASPIRA Attendance Sheet
9. ASPIRA Club Agenda
10. Academic Tracking Sheet
11. Conference/Field Trip Planner Timetable & Plan
12. Monthly Report Form
13. Monthly Employee Performance Feedback Report
14. Quarterly Monitoring Report
15. Student Evaluation Form for ASPIRA Services
16. Student Evaluation Form for Counseling Services
17. Employee Performance Appraisal